
14. (U) Economically, Anhui lags far behind the other provinces in East China. Most of Anhui's wealth is concentrated in industrial regions close to the Yangtze River, such as Hefei, Wuhu, and Maanshan. Anhui's 2006 USD 79.4 billion GDP is roughly one-third that of neighboring Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. According to provincial officials, Anhui's average income is RMB 2,000 (USD 266) per month, compared with approximately RMB 6,000 in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, and RMB 8,000 in Shanghai. When asked by ConOff, local university students and school children expressed their hopes to someday leave Anhui for Shanghai and (less often) Beijing. The majority of "Mingong" (immigrant workers) in Shanghai come from Anhui to be maids, janitors, and work in dangerous high-rise construction.

15. (U) Efforts by the Central Government to strengthen Anhui's economy have been largely unsuccessful. For example, to promote technological development in Anhui, in 1970 the Central Government moved the prestigious University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) from Beijing to Hefei, Anhui's capital. Unfortunately, according to local officials, USTC graduates invariably leave Hefei for employment in Beijing and Shanghai, or pursue post-graduate work abroad. Local officials are proud, however, that Anhui produces more refrigerators than any other province in China. (NOTE: Although refrigerators were mentioned several times during the visit, Anhui officials made no mention of Anhui's most famous corporation: the automobile company Chery based in Wuhu, which has recently moved to enter the American sub-compact, under USD 10,000 auto market. END NOTE.)

GREAT SIGHTS, BAD LOCATION

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16. (U) In a bold attempt to look beyond home appliances, Anhui is seeking economic advancement through tourism. As part of the tourism festival, local authorities took ConOff to visit Anhui's tourist destinations, chief among which is "Huangshan" (Yellow Mountain). Three hours south of Hefei by car, Huangshan is one of China's most popular tourist spots and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1990. The area is renowned for its scenic beauty, jutting granite peaks, and unique "giant Banzai" Huangshan pine trees. Because many of its peaks are above cloud level, views of the clouds from above offer beautiful views and interesting light-effects, which over the centuries have been given wistful names like Sea of Clouds and Buddha's Light. With its hot springs, natural pools, and gorges, Huangshan is an oft-featured subject of traditional Chinese paintings and literature. A photo gallery of Huangshan's scenic beauty can be found here:
<http://www.phototravels.net/china/yellow-mountain-huangshan.html>. Huangshan is surprisingly popular with South Koreans, with direct flights daily to Korea from the relatively small Huangshan village airport. Besides Koreans, ConOff saw no other non-Chinese tourists on the mountain.

LOCAL CULTURE, VERY LOCAL CUISINE

17. (U) In Yixian County, an hour's drive from Huangshan, lay Xidi village and Hongcun village, which together in 2000 became the "Ancient Villages in Southern Anhui" UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hongcun was a film location for "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Due to the popularity of this Oscar-winning film, tourism to these cities has dramatically increased. The architecture and carvings of these cities date back to the Ming and Qing dynasties, and are among the best examples of their kind in China. At each of the cities, tourists pay an entrance fee of about USD 10, and are free to visit and explore hundreds of well-preserved wooden residences with beautiful carvings. These residences are still occupied, giving tourists a flavor for what life must have been like in these ancient villages.

18. (U) In addition to its cultural heritage, Anhui is very proud of its local food, which officials claim as one of the eight great traditional Chinese cuisines. Combining cooking elements from throughout Anhui, including the Yixian Hui-speaking region, the cuisine is known for its use of river fish, wild game, and herbs all prepared in uncomplicated ways. ConOff had the dubious privilege of sampling various forms of wild game (i.e., frog, hedgehog, snail, and several varieties of unnamed innards) prepared in simple ways (most frequently boiled for a very, very long time). ConOff was both impressed and puzzled by the differentiation made by locals between ostensibly similar dishes (e.g., "boiled stone frog," "boiled field frog," "boiled mountain frog," etc.) When ConOff commented on this phenomenon to an official from the Anhui Tourism Council, the official thoughtfully responded that perhaps the ConOff had not yet developed a refined palate for the nuances of amphibian delicacies. ConOff admitted that this was indeed true, and that this handicap apparently extended to a wide variety of snail dishes, as well.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Anhui tourism officials commented frequently throughout the trip that they do not receive many western, particularly American tourists. One especially astute official opined that this was because the main draw to Anhui is Huangshan, nicknamed the Yosemite of China, which (although unique in China) was similar in nature to several national parks in the United States. Americans, he said, don't need to travel to China to see impressive mountains; moreover American mountains have ski resorts. While Americans do go to Huangshan, Anhui officials noted that the majority of these are (ethnic) Chinese Americans, and for the most part older, Chinese-born, naturalized U.S. citizens. ConOff feels many Americans would truly enjoy Xidi and Hongcun cities, which despite the cuisine, were truly impressive examples of what many Americans expect to see when visiting China. Unfortunately, Anhui is distant from many of the typical tourist sites visited by Americans in China: Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, etc. Given the average American's lack

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of familiarity with Huangshan, and Anhui in general, it is unlikely that American tourism will expand rapidly without concerted efforts by Anhui Tourism Officials to promote itself among American tourists and travel agencies. END COMMENT.
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